MONTGOMERY NOTEBOOK

Domestic Workers' 'Bill of Rights' Lacks Council Backing

By NANCY TREJOS Washington Post Staff Writer

omestic workers in Montgomery County won't be getting their own 'bill of rights' to protect them from relatively low salaries and poor health insurance. That decision will be left to the next County Council elected in November

Council President George L. Leventhal (D-At Large), who is up for reelection, said this week that no council member would sponsor a bill calling for a minimum wage of \$10.50 an

hour as well as health insurance, paid sick days and paid holidays for domestic workers, many of them Hispanic women who work as house-

of them Hispanic women who work as house-keepers or namics.

A survey commissioned by the council and conducted by George Washington University graduate students this year found that domes-tic workers are underpaid, work long hours and receive inadequate health-are benefits and retirement provisions.

On Monday, the Montgomery County Com-mission for Women sent a memo to the council recommending that the county conduct a pub-

lic information campaign about workers' rights and employers' responsibilities and create a community-based resource center for discounting the county government. The commission did not take a position on the bill of rights.

Leventhal said he and other council mensers would consider the commission's recommendations but had concerns about the bill of rights.

"I think for us to establish rights in law for the private market, demanding certain wages

the private market, demanding certain wages and benefits, it's a dramatic step that county

government has not taken before." he said.
"We do not regulate wages and benefits for the
private market today."

CASA of Maryland, the nouprofit immigrant advocacy group that has led the bill of
rights effort, is not giving up.

Alexis de Simone, CASA's women's organizer, said that the organization would lobby

Duchy Trachtenberg and Valerie Erwis, the two

female non-incumbent Democratic nomimes

for council seats in the Nov. 7 general election.

"I think they're going to be a lot more re-sponsive to the needs of our community and the needs of low-income working women," de

Simone said.

Trachtenberg said she would support a community-based center for the workers but stopped short of backing the legislation.

Tru certainly hopeful that Tll have conversations with CASA about this in the future," she said. "As to what I would sponsor, Tru not quite sure at this point what that would be."

be." Ervin said she wants domestic workers to get better treatment but thinks the bill of rights proposal is flawed.
"The bill was just not ready for prime time, and it's got a lot of problems with it because I don't think the county has any legal standing to do what they are asking the county to do," she said.

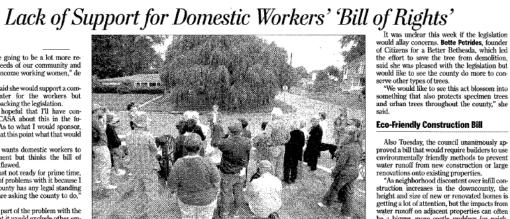
she said. Leventhal said part of the problem with the bill of rights is that it would exclude other em-

ployees.
"Domestic workers for the most part don't get two weeks' paid vacation but neither do bartenders or cab drivers," Leventhal said.

De Sinone said domestic workers are par-ticularly vulnerable "Domestic workers have been so isolated and so excluded from labor protection that they need labor protection,"

Legislation for 'Champion Trees'

The County Council on Tuesday unani-mously approved emergency legislation to protect "champion trees," or trees designated by the state as the largest of their species with-



Bette Petrides speaks to a group of neighbors who have rallied to protect a weeping cherry tree at 7708 Marbury Rd. Petrides is the founder of Citizens for a Better Bethesda.

Council member Howard A. Denis (R-Potomac-Bethesda) sponsored the bill after a group of Bethesda residents embarked on a mission to save a weeping cherry tree at 7708 Marbury

"I am very concerned about the rapid loss of urban and suburban trees in the county," De-nis said in a statement. "Trees and urban for-ests offer numerous community and environ-mental benefits. There ought to be some protection for our finest trees.

Denis said his bill was aimed at getting rid Denis said his bill was aimed at getting rid of ambiguities in the existing forest conservation law, which some county officials said was not applicable to properties smaller than 40,000 square feet. The bill would protect champion trees regardless of where they are or the size of the lot. "The encouraged," said Steve Kanstoroom, an Ashton resident who helped craft the law. "I think Howie Denis showed he's a champion of champions. This is an important step in protecting Montgomery County tree canopies."

were other types of trees.

"We would like to see this act blossom into something that also protects specimen trees and urban trees throughout the county," she

Eco-Friendly Construction Bill

Also Tuesday, the council unanimously ap-proved a bill that would require builders to use environmentally friendly methods to prevent

environmentally mentory mentors to prevent water runoff from new construction or large renovations onto existing properties. "As neighborhood discontent over infill con-struction increases in the downcounty, the height and size of new or renovated homes is getting a lot of attention, but the impacts from water runoff on adjacent properties can offen be a bigger, more costly problem for neigh-bors," said County Council member Nancy Flo-reen (D-At Large), sponsor of the bill, in a

County officials said they believe the bill is the first of its kind in the nation. It will go into

County Executive Debate

Montgomery College's Channel 10 will re-broadcast a debate among county executive candidates sponsored by the League of Worn-en Voters of Montgomery County. The dates are today, 7 p.m.; tomorrow, 6 p.m.; next Thursday, 7 p.m. and Oct. 27-at 6